

Soviet Resumes Tests of Orbital Bombing System

By EVERT CLARK

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 25 —

The Soviet Union resumed testing of an orbital bombing system today, authoritative sources said. Other sources disclosed that a Russian attempt to send an unmanned spacecraft around the moon failed last weekend.

The test of the orbital bombing system today was the ninth Russian space flight in 11 days, the most active period for any nation since space flight began.

Yesterday, the Russians launched the fourth in a somewhat mysterious group of flights that seem to be tests of a large, highly maneuverable new rocket stage.

In addition, Moscow has announced that "research ships" of the kind used to track and control manned flights have been dispersed to equatorial zones in the Atlantic and elsewhere, indicating that amanned flight is probably near.

Thought Tests Had Ended

The flurry of Russian launchings exceeds even that of last October, when the Soviet celebrated the 10th anniversary of space flight and the 50th anniversary of the Communist revolution by sending up 10 spacecraft in 19 days.

The spacecraft tested today, identified by the Soviet Union only as Cosmos 218, was the first in six months to involve the orbital bomb system. Many observers here had assumed the tests had ended.

As with two unsuccessful and nine successful tests of the bombing system in 1966 and 1967, the flight today was believed to have tested only the orbital techniques. The craft apparently did not carry a bomb.

There is now speculation that

tracked more carefully by an opponent than one that struck its target after making only a fraction of a circuit of the earth. But an orbiting bomb with a powerful maneuvering stage attached could be suddenly diverted from the "storage" orbit and hurtled to a target so rapidly that an opponent would have great difficulty in tracking and intercepting it.

The first three maneuvering stage tests have left debris both in their initial orbits and in the higher orbits to which the spacecraft later climbed. No explanation for this is known.

It is reported here that the

failure of a rocket stage kept the planned circumlunar flight from reaching an earth orbit last weekend. A similar mishap spoiled a Soviet attempt to send an unmanned craft around the moon last Nov. 22.

Soviet Presses Drive

American experts say that the Soviet Union has accelerated not only its launching rate in recent months but also the resources and the number of highly skilled workers in its space program.

This comes at a time when budget cuts, resulting chiefly from the war in Vietnam, have forced stringent curtailment of American space plans.

James E. Webb, head of the

National Aeronautics and Space Administration, told a Senate committee yesterday, "The rate they [the Russians] are generating is something to give us real pause as a nation."

He has repeatedly predicted that the Soviet Union will soon fly a rocket booster larger than the American Saturn 5 moon rocket. This Saturn, the first to give this country a clear lead in space weight-lifting ability, will be produced at the rate of only two a year after the first lunar flights. Mr. Webb predicted that the Soviet Union would seek more frequent launchings with its new booster, as it has with most of its other rockets.

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